

The Exit from the Normalized State of Emergency is Possible with Solidarity!

Outcome Report of the LGBTI+ Organization Workshop

October 24-25, 2020

Diyarbakır Keskesor LGBTI+, Denizli LGBTI+ Families, Kocaeli LGBTI+, Queer Adana and Antep Zeugmadi LGBTI+ Association came together online on October 24-25 and discussed the experiences of LGBTI+ organizations since 2015, the sustainability problems of the organizations, solutions to these problems and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBTI+ organizations in different cities.

With this report, we share the prominent results of this meeting organized by the Muamma LGBTI + Association and Kaos GL Association.

Current situation: From LGBTI+ activity bans to the pandemic...

2015 was an important turning point for LGBT+ rights and movement in Turkey. The police attack on the Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Parade, which has been peaceful for many years, and subsequent smear campaign against LGBTI+'s by the politicians, turned into a call for carnage, a group calling themselves Young Islamic Defense put up posters on the streets of Ankara calling for the slaughter of LGBTI+'s. Police attacked the Pride Parade with plastic bullets, gas and water cannons, many were injured. In 2016, a new era began in Turkey in terms of LGBTI+ rights, where ISIS sent threats to Kaos GL, the March Against Homophobia and Transphobia in Ankara was banned, İstanbul Pride Parade was once again banned, hate attacks and

murders were on the rise, smear campaigns against LGBTI+’s became systematic thanks to the media and politicians. In 2017, hostility towards LGBTI+’s became an official Government policy with the Governorate of Ankara’s indefinite ban against LGBTI+ activities throughout the city. LGBTI + enmity became a Government policy in 2017, during the state of emergency, Ankara Governorship banned LGBTI + activities throughout the city indefinitely. There were two separate indefinite bans for LGBTI+'s and associations defending LGBTI+ rights in Ankara, one declared during the state of emergency (first ban) and the other declared during the so-called post-state of emergency period (second ban). During the state of emergency period, Kaos GL Association won the legal struggle against the Governorate of Ankara's indefinite LGBTI+ activity ban announced in November 2017. In April 2019, the Regional Administrative Court stated that the ban declared during the state of emergency was unlimited in terms of duration and there was no limitation and certainty regarding the nature of the prohibited acts. The court ruled that the ban was not in accordance with the law, stating that instead of banning, law enforcement measures should be taken if there was a threat to the activities. The ban ordinance was revoked. On the other hand, despite the abolition of emergency, the judicial process for the decision of the Ankara Governorship's Legal Affairs Branch that it sent to the Provincial Police Department on October 3, 2018, for the same grounds has continued so far. The second ban was lifted along with the verdict that is announced in the late hours of March 23, 2020. Thus, the bans on LGBTI+ events in Ankara came to an end. Then, the pandemic has begun...

While the global crisis caused by the spread of the new type of coronavirus (Covid-19) continues, governments' statements of "We are on the same ship" continue to be one of the main discourses of combating the pandemic. The first detected case in Turkey was announced on March 11. Since then,

the government has taken and implemented a number of measures under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

While the Ministry of Health calls citizens to stay at home, workers in many lines of work are forced to go to work. The Covid 19 story of Turkey, which can be summed as "Everyone has their own state of emergency"; also causes serious problems for LGBTI+'s, who are currently the most vulnerable in the country, who have serious problems in accessing rights, and whose rights to life are systematically violated.

Aside from inequalities in access to the right to healthcare and employment, increased domestic violence as an outcome of being forced into homes, LGBTI+'s also became the target of various hate campaigns during the epidemic.

According to the Pandemic Report¹ published by the Association for Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies (SPoD) in June, which includes the association's experiences in various fields of work in the first three months of the COVID-19 epidemic; there was a hundred percent increase in discrimination and violence based on gender identity and sexual orientation following the Friday Khutbah of the Religious Affairs Administration (Diyanet) Chairperson Ali Erbaş, which targeted the LGBTI+'s and people living with HIV.

The data of the Young LGBTI + Association's "The State of the LGBTI + Community in the COVID-19 Outbreak"² research also reveals the extent of

¹<http://www.spod.org.tr/TR/Detay/50128/4/spod-pandemi-raporu-cikti> Last date of access: 07.11.2020

²<https://genclgbti.org/2020/09/02/covid-19-salgininda-lgbti-toplulugunun-durumu-arastirma-raporu-yayinlandi/>
Last date of access: 07.11.2020

domestic violence. According to the report, 42 of the participants who stated that they were subjected to more than one form of violence said that they were subjected to domestic violence (all kinds of physical, sexual, psychological, economic, etc. violence from one or more people living in the family or home). Emotional violence, economic violence, verbal violence, physical violence, sexual violence and cyber violence are found as prominent types of violence.

Even though the calls to stay at home and quarantine are correct and appropriate to prevent the spread of Covid-19; It can create new problems for LGBTI+'s, who are not able to stay at home or who are likely to be subjected to violence by family members when they stay at home. The government or relevant ministries do not have an action plan to solve these problems.

In addition to the risk of violence, discrimination in accessing the right to healthcare becomes a more vital issue during the pandemic; there are major problems based on the facts that trans' who are in gender confirmation or adaptation period cannot go to hospitals and have to postpone the procedures regarding their processes, LGBTI+'s living with HIV cannot continue their hospital checks, and refugee LGBTI+'s who have problems in accessing their right to health are not even able to quarantine themselves. LGBTI+'s are among the groups that experience discrimination in employment the most; face the fear of losing their job, unemployment and loss of income. LGBTI+ sex workers who do not have social security experience the most intense financial income loss. On the one hand, the coronavirus and on the other the loss of income. LGBTI+'s are one of the groups that most affected by the near cessation of the service and

entertainment industry. While all these are happening, hate campaigns targeting LGBTI+'s are also spreading.

In recent years, besides the ban decisions of the Governorates and District Governorships, the statements and practices of high-level public officials targeting LGBTI+ have been systematicalized. In the early days of the pandemic, school principals posted messages targeting LGBTI+'s on the instructions of the Regional National Education Directors in WhatsApp groups that were created to organize online education on quarantine days, hate campaigns were launched on social media over a homosexual character on Netflix, the Chairperson of RTÜK's (Radio and Television Supreme Council) discriminatory statement, Diyanet's hate khutbah and various ministers defending it. The process that started with these events stretched to the Pride Week.

While #onurhaftası (Pride Week) was on the TT list, the tags #YallahHollandaya (Back to Netherlands) and #LGBTFaaliyetleriDurdurulsun (Stop the LGBT activities) were launched. In the first days of the coronavirus pandemic, #YallahHollandya and #LGBTFaaliyetleriDurdurulsun tags, which are the last step of the campaigns that called for the ban of LGBTI+ activities and the ban of LGBTI+ organizations, remained on the TT list for a long time. With these tags, calls for boycott of companies supporting LGBTI+ rights have become widespread. Among the accounts participating in the hate campaign, there were also highly influential accounts approved by Twitter. Women and Democracy Association (KADEM) continued its hate speech that had already become its common practice. A call was made to "kill homosexuals" from the İhvan's TV channel in İstanbul. All these are just a small part of the hatred towards LGBTI+'s during the pandemic...

Since 2015, the bans have not been limited to Ankara and İstanbul. Although a comprehensive and indefinite ban as in Ankara did not spread to other provinces; Pride Week or Pride Parades were banned in İzmir, Mersin and Antalya in various years. Event-based bans have restricted the freedom of association of LGBTI+'s in many cities to say the least.

Problems faced by LGBTI+ organizations

Especially after the 2013 Gezi Resistance, LGBTI+'s in many cities across Turkey sped up their organization by coming together. LGBTI+ organizations were established in many cities. Some of these formations became associations and gained legal status; a significant portion of them continued as initiatives or formations. With the public pressure that started to increase in 2015, bans and the state of emergency, most of these organizations had to dissolve.

According to the two-day meeting with five organizations from five cities, some of which were established before or after the Gezi resistance, the following problems stand out:

- *Organizing in smaller cities can become difficult due to the risk of being targeted and the socio-cultural structure of the city. LGBTI+ activists are having problems with security.
- *Most of the time, LGBTI+ organizations are one of the few organizations working in the gender studies in their city. The scarcity of solidarity channels also affects the methods of struggle.
- *The fact that organizations are student-centered in many cities harms the sustainability of the struggle in that city when students graduate. The fact that students have to return to the cities where their families live, and their

weak ties with the city due to the fact that LGBTI+ activism focuses on university or young people also causes problems. LGBTI+ organizations have difficulty reaching other LGBTI+'s who are not students but live in the city.

*Difficulties in transferring experience and accumulating memory are other obstacles to the sustainability of LGBTI+ organizations. Failure to create a non-hierarchical structure and the lack of a non-hierarchical transfer of experience also cause problems. Problems such as the interruption of the LGBTI+ organization in that city at certain periods, the problems in the transfer of experiences between LGBTI+ activists, and the inability to transfer the memory of the city and the struggle are often faced.

*The ban on LGBTI+ activities in cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Mersin and Antalya causes anxiety in other cities as well. Anti-LGBTI+ political formations and the anti-LGBTI+ positions of public institutions and officials negatively affect both organization of events and people. Organizing events via open calls becomes difficult, and anti-LGBTI+ statements, threats and hate speech by local media and local political actors raise security concerns.

*Appointment of trustees to municipalities in Diyarbakır also led to the loss of contact with municipalities on LGBTI+ rights. In other cities, there are problems such as indifference of the municipalities about LGBTI+ rights and ignoring the problems that LGBTI+'s experience in accessing services.

*Violation of the privacy rights of LGBTI+ activists by local actors and the media poses risks to both activists and the ability of organization.

*The fact that the LGBTI+ movement had to withdraw more in recent years and the decrease in alliance possibilities negatively affect LGBTI+ activism in the cities. It leads to the loss of past gains.

*The fact that LGBTI+ activists are forced to emigrate to other cities or abroad on grounds such as unemployment or hate crimes undermines LGBTI+ organisation.

*Poor communication between LGBTI+ organisations in different cities and periodic fractures also reduce solidarity.

*Hate attacks threaten both the LGBTI+ community and its organization.

*Rising authoritarianism, right-wing populism and tensions in the country's politics are also affecting LGBTI+ organisation.

*Another common problem in many cities is the difficulties in finding venues for events.

*One of the most important problems is the inadequacy of economic resources, the lack of legal personality restricting access to financial resources and the lack of equities.

In summary, anti-LGBTI+ practice and policies that started before the state of emergency and have institutionalized with state of emergency and continued even after the end of the state of emergency, economic resource deficiencies, problems in sustainability and shortcomings in memory transfers restrict LGBTI+'s freedom to organize...

The exit from the normalized State of Emergency is possible with solidarity!

The LGBTI+ organizations we interviewed stressed that exiting this whole pessimistic atmosphere and the normalized state of emergency conditions is possible with solidarity.

*Strengthening the culture of solidarity between LGBTI+'s, finding new channels of solidarity between LGBTI+ organizations and enhancing communication are among the most important and urgent needs.

*The participation of LGBTI+'s in politics and the political field and their struggle to be in the social and political climate of the city are found promising.

*The ability of LGBTI+ organisations to act quickly in times of crisis, and the will to jointly fight against waves of smear campaigns, strengthens the LGBTI+ movement as a whole.

*On the other hand, the facts that LGBTI+ organizations accumulate their own stories of comradeship and friendship, organizations are being sprung out from the life itself; are important in dispersing the atmosphere of oppression.

*The organizations which are predominantly involved by students or young people has the potential to participate in the social life of the city and to cooperate with universities.

*The comradeship with women's organisations and feminist organisations in the cities strengthens both the LGBTI+ movement and the women's movement.

*The solidarity with human rights organizations, as well as democratic mass organizations such as trade unions and bar associations, which have been

observed to be declining during the state of emergency period, needs to be rebuilt.

*LGBTI+ organisations are also transforming their cities. It contributes to the democratization of the cities.

All these facts show that exiting the state of emergency situation, which has become a normal policy against the LGBTI+'s, is only possible in solidarity with other LGBTI+ organizations as well as other subjects fighting for human rights and democracy...